

# Melanoma in West Virginia

## Melanoma Quick Facts<sup>1</sup>

- Melanoma is an uncommon, but dangerous, type of skin cancer
- Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from sunlight, tanning beds, and other sources increases your chances of developing melanoma

## Health Tips

- Reduce exposure to the sun and avoid tanning beds
- Always wear sunscreen
- Wear protective clothing
- Seek shade when possible
- Avoid intense sunshine, usually between 10 AM and 4 PM
- Check your skin regularly for unusual moles, and for spots on the skin that are painful, bleed, or itch
- Talk to your doctor if you have any concerns

For more information, please  
contact the West Virginia  
Cancer Registry

[www.cancerregistry.wv.gov](http://www.cancerregistry.wv.gov)  
**304-356-4953**

## What is melanoma?

Melanoma is a serious type of skin cancer that begins to develop in melanocytes (a type of skin cell). Melanomas can occur anywhere on the skin, but are most often found on the chest and back in men, and on the legs in women. Other common sites include the neck and face. Melanoma is less common than other types of skin cancer, but it is much more dangerous. Like most forms of skin cancer, it is very treatable if caught early. However, melanoma is more likely to spread to other parts of the body if not treated early, and can be fatal.<sup>2</sup>

## What are the warning signs of melanoma?

Most cases of melanoma are associated with abnormal moles on the skin. It is important to check your skin at least once a month and schedule a yearly visit with a dermatologist. You should watch for the following changes in moles as these are warning signs of melanoma:

**A—Asymmetry:** Does the mole or spot have an irregular shape with two parts that look very different?

**B—Border:** Is the border irregular or jagged?

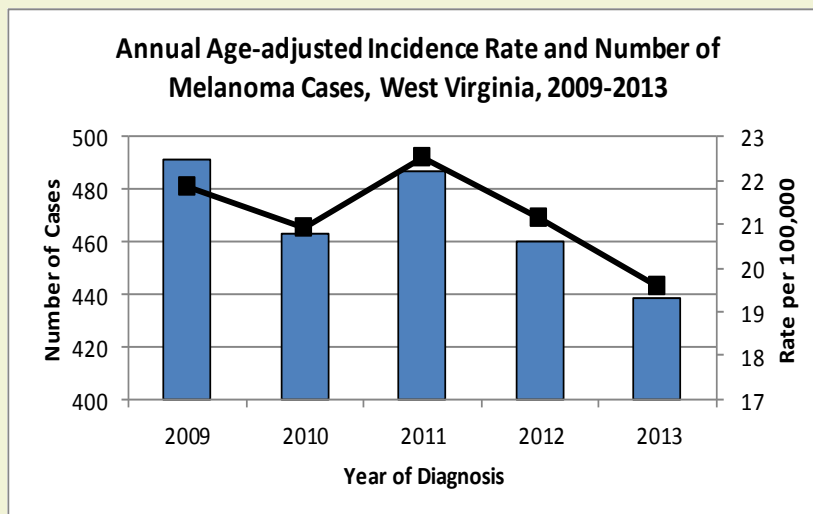
**C—Color:** Is the color uneven?

**D—Diameter:** Is the spot larger than the size of a pea?

**E—Evolving:** Has the spot grown or changed in the past few weeks or months?

## How common is melanoma in West Virginia?

Between 400 and 500 West Virginians are diagnosed with melanoma every year.<sup>3</sup>



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## What risk factors are associated with melanoma?

These factors may increase your risk of developing melanoma:

- Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from sunlight, tanning beds, or sun lamps
- A history of sunburns, especially during childhood
- A personal or family history of skin cancer
- A high number of moles
- Fair skin, light hair, freckling, and blue or green eyes

## How can I help protect myself against melanoma?<sup>4</sup>

- Always use sunscreen that provides broad spectrum protection from both UVA and UVB rays, with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. Apply sunscreen about 15 minutes before sun exposure, even on cloudy or overcast days. Reapply every two hours, or after swimming, sweating, or drying off with a towel.
- Wear protective clothing, such as long-sleeved shirts, long pants, or long dresses. Wear a wide-brimmed hat and UV-blocking sunglasses.
- Seek shade when possible. The sun's rays are strongest between 10 AM and 4 PM, so try to limit the amount of time you spend in direct sunlight during those hours.
- Use caution around reflective environments such as water, sand, snow, and concrete. These surfaces can reflect and magnify the harmful rays from the sun.
- Avoid sunburns. Just one blistering sunburn can double your chances of developing melanoma.
- Avoid sunbathing and indoor tanning beds.
- Be aware of your medications. Some prescription medications and over-the-counter drugs can increase your skin's sensitivity to sunlight, causing you to burn more easily.

## Early detection is key!

- Check your skin every month for unusual moles or other warning signs. Spots on the skin that are painful, bleeding, or itching should also be checked by a doctor.
- Schedule a yearly visit with your dermatologist.
- Talk to your doctor if you have any concerns.

## References

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2. American Academy of Dermatology. <https://www.aad.org/public/diseases/skin-cancer/melanoma>. Accessed February, 2016.
3. West Virginia Cancer Registry, data as of November, 2015.
4. Melanoma Research Foundation. *Practicing Effective Melanoma Prevention*. <http://www.melanoma.org/understand-melanoma/preventing-melanoma>. Accessed February, 2016

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